

# Letter of Transmittal

**November 20, 2003**

*To the President of the United States, President of the Senate, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives:*

I am pleased to submit the Department of Veterans Affairs' FY 2003 Annual Performance and Accountability Report. As America's troops return from liberating Iraq, we are reminded once again of the incredible sacrifices our servicemen and women make in defense of freedom. During fiscal year 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has fulfilled our responsibility to provide veterans with the best in benefits and health care by making our department a model of excellence. One way we have done so is by focusing our business practices on management accountability and systematic improvement. For example:



- Our health care system delivers world-class medicine to almost 5 million veterans and leads the Nation's health care providers in using computerized records, treating spinal cord injury, improving prosthetics, and promoting patient safety. Our focus continues to be on meeting the health care needs of our core group of veterans – those with service-connected disabilities, with lower incomes, or who require specialized care.
- Our benefits programs ensure that more than 14,953,000 veterans and their families receive the compensation, pension, education, insurance, home loan guaranty, and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits they earned through their service to our Nation.
- Our cemetery program made certain that last year, almost 90,000 veterans and eligible family members were buried with dignity and honor in our national cemeteries.
- VA once again obtained an unqualified audit opinion on our consolidated financial statements, continuing the tradition of financial management excellence first achieved in 1999.

The performance and financial data in the report are reliable and complete. This report documents our progress in addressing identified material weaknesses. Our evaluation of senior administrative and program managers' annual assessments provides reasonable assurance that the management controls and financial systems of VA generally adhere to the requirements of the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act. We continue to make progress on the implementation of our integrated financial management system, Core Financial and Logistics System, which will enhance VA's compliance with governmentwide financial integrity standards.

In fiscal year 2004, our Department will continue to improve our stewardship of the funds entrusted to us, improve our capital asset management program, and plan for the future needs of America's veterans and their families.

VA is proud to serve veterans with dignity and compassion, and to be their principal advocate to the President, Congress and the American people. We are honored to promote the health, welfare, and dignity of veterans in recognition of their service to our Nation, and to embody our Nation's response to President Abraham Lincoln's challenge "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony J. Principi". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Anthony J. Principi  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs